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Draft report

Chapter III

General debate

Rapporteur: Mohammed Reza Sahraei (Islamic Republic of Iran)

1. Statements in the general debate were made by the following States members of the Committee on Information: Argentina (on behalf of the States Members of the United Nations that are members of the Group of 77 and China), Hungary (on behalf of the States Members of the United Nations that are members of the European Union), Chile (on behalf of the Rio Group), Belarus, Indonesia, Pakistan, China, Cuba, Brazil, Peru, India, Costa Rica, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Algeria, Senegal, the Syrian Arab Republic, Egypt, the Russian Federation, Venezuela, Mexico, Japan, Israel, Zambia, Bangladesh, the United Republic of Tanzania and the United States of America. Palestine, in its capacity as observer, also made a statement. The general debate was preceded by statements by the Chairman of the Committee and by the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information of the Department of Public Information.

2. In taking up the substantive questions before the Committee, speakers emphasized the important role of the Department of Public Information in communicating the work of the United Nations to a broad and diverse global audience. The themes of the discussion included the importance of building effective partnerships and the use of social media tools to communicate messages, especially to youthful audiences.

3. One speaker, addressing the Committee on behalf of a group, encouraged the Department to reach out to the widest possible audience and project the accomplishments of the Organization worldwide. Another speaker, also speaking on

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behalf of a group, echoed those remarks and encouraged the Department to continue to utilize traditional media, such as radio, television and print, while also embracing new media platforms in different forms. Yet another speaker, speaking on behalf of a group, expressed the hope of his group that the resulting resolution would reflect the Department's support for the Organization's core priorities of promoting peace and security, development and human rights.

4. Several speakers called for more vigorous intervention from the United Nations in bridging the "digital divide". While applauding the creative use of modern technology, they stressed their concern that some in the developing world lacked access to new information technology and, therefore, to a portion of the flow of information. UN Radio was cited as an excellent communications tool for reaching audiences, even in remote regions of the world.

5. In discussing the Department's increasing use of social media tools, speakers had varied views. One speaker expressed concern over the lack of edited content on social media sites, while others stated that social media was predominantly English-dominated. Other speakers praised the Department's innovative approach to social media and referred to its particular reach to young audiences.

6. A number of speakers discussed the importance of achieving linguistic parity in the work of the Department of Public Information. Advocating further strengthening of multilingualism, some speakers noted that the Department should work to close the gap between the number of web pages offered in English and those in other languages, while bearing in mind that content is often provided from Departments other than the Department of Public Information. Another speaker, reflecting the view of a group of Member States, noted that more resources should be allocated to achieving full parity of languages. Some speakers also questioned the predominance of English and French over other official languages in the various outputs of the Department.

7. Several speakers lauded the continued cooperation of the Department of Public Information with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support. One speaker encouraged the Department to continue working with those two Departments, as it was important for Member States and the public to receive up-to-date information on United Nations peacekeeping. A few speakers urged the Department to work to convey the constraints and challenges faced by peacekeepers, while others encouraged the Department to place emphasis in its information materials on the responsibility to protect children, women and civilians.

8. A number of speakers also commented on the Department's special information programme on the question of Palestine, which reflected the Department's commitment to contribute to an environment that supported dialogue and the peace process. The annual training programme for Palestinian media professionals, designed to assist them in developing their media capacity and skills, was praised, as was the annual international media seminar. In the context of journalist programmes, a speaker also mentioned the Reham al-Farra Fellowships, citing the need for journalists from his region to receive more opportunities to become more familiar with the work of the United Nations.

9. The importance of intercultural and interreligious dialogue was stressed by a number of speakers. Noting the Department's efforts to disseminate information in support of such dialogue and to promote mutual respect, including through the

"Unlearning Intolerance" seminar series, speakers praised the Department's outreach efforts. Along the same lines, a number of speakers praised the United Nations Academic Impact initiative, launched last November to serve as a means for universities and other institutions of research and higher learning to contribute to the Organization's awareness and thinking in critical areas.

10. Several speakers commented on the outreach programmes of the Department of Public Information and lauded its work with students and youth. Speakers expressed support for the further strengthening of innovative partnerships, such as cooperation with civil society and with other groups, such as academia and the creative arts community. Some speakers praised the Department's outreach programme on international events, such as the commemoration of the remembrance of the victims of slave trade, the International Day of Nowruz and the outreach programme on the Holocaust. The Global Model United Nations Conference was cited by a speaker as an effective educational tool for youth audiences. Another speaker referred to the UN4U programme as a popular programme utilized in many countries to reach young audiences.

11. The work and activities of the network of United Nations information centres were commented on by a number of speakers, who described them as "an invaluable link to the public", "a vital source", "crucial in enhancing the public image of the Organization", and "essential", in conveying information about the United Nations in numerous local languages. One speaker, addressing the Committee on behalf of a group, urged that all possible measures be taken to strengthen United Nations information centres, which served a particularly important role in developing countries as an essential source of communication and information. Other speakers addressed the issue of resource constraints and the need for the centres to form creative partnerships with civil society in order to do more with less. With regard to the reference to the need to provide more training for staff, particularly those from the information centres, one speaker commented on the importance of finalizing arrangements for the centre in Luanda, Angola, so that Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa would have this resource.

12. Several speakers lauded the Department for the positive role it had played when natural disasters and calamities had struck. The Department had used creative and innovative means of communication to disseminate information to populations in need in affected areas, as well as to potential donors, to elicit a global, popular response.

13. In connection with the observance of World Press Freedom Day, several speakers referred to the importance of freedom of expression and freedom of the press. On behalf of one group, a speaker commented that his group underlined the importance of World Press Freedom Day in raising the awareness of Governments regarding the duty to uphold the right to freedom of expression. Another speaker pointed out that the observance of the Day signified the importance of the observance of basic principles of human rights.

14. The session included an interactive dialogue where members of the Committee shared views and questions with senior leadership of the Department.